

A SPORTING GUIDE TO THE CARIBBEAN

DECEMBER 1991



# Outside®

## The Incredible Shrinking Environmental Movement

*A Special Holiday Report*

*Tim Cahill*

**Smells Kuwait Burning**

*Alex Heard*

**Watches Bush Fiddling**

*Jon Krakauer*

**Meets the New Grinch**



*The Editors*

**Rate the Green Groups**

**Plus: Downhill Skis and  
Boots, Inn-to-Inn Skiing, and  
Bill Bryson's Wild, Wild  
New Year's Eve**



U.S. \$2.95  
CANADA \$3.50





# UNHAPPY BIRTHDAY



**L**AST OCTOBER THE NATIONAL Park Service threw a birthday party for itself. It was a posh event, held in Vail, Colorado, featuring speakers representing the inner sanctum of America's conservation elite. Costing \$500,000 and receiving financial support from a host of donors that included Laurance Rockefeller and Walt Disney, it was attended by more than 300 people from public agencies. The organizers had hoped that 300 other citizens would attend as well, but two weeks before the conference only 30 had signed up. A frantic last-minute recruiting campaign netted more but failed to fill the quota. The Park Service, in short, threw itself a party, but not enough people came.

This event symbolizes the plight of the National Park Service. The agency, which turned 75 this year, is in deep trouble, but few Americans seem to care. Lacking strong leadership and a clearly defined mission, it is a rudderless ship in a stormy sea of ecological change, unable to steer a course that would bring it—and the national parks—to safety.

The list of threats to the national parks is almost endless: soil erosion, air pollution, oil spills, toxic wastes, insect infestations, feral and exotic animals, urban sprawl. Research reveals that 42 major mammalian species have already disappeared from our national parks, and more are at risk. The wolves of Isle Royale are dwindling in number, victims of a shrinking gene pool. Everglades has lost 90 percent of its wading birds. The streams of Olympic are losing their salmon. The pristine waters of Crater Lake have been polluted, perhaps by a substandard park sewage plant. Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area contains a toxic waste dump site and countless leaking gas wells. Even though the Park Service spends more than half its budget on maintenance, the buildings and infrastructure in many parks are collapsing from neglect.

Yet the Park Service is unable to respond effectively to these problems. Its ranger force is woefully lacking in professional training to cope with increasingly complex

## *The National Park Service gets older, but no wiser*



ecological problems. And a Byzantine bureaucratic structure makes rational decision-making all but impossible. But most important, the agency is suffering from an identity crisis. It is the nation's premier preservation agency, yet it usually behaves like a Ministry of Tourism. It has never been able to define a coherent set of preservation policies.

Saving the parks, therefore, requires reforming the Park Service. But this is not something the agency can do itself. Professionalization of rangers will only happen when outside political forces—environmentalists, members of Congress, and other constructive critics—force reform. Yet rather than growing as a political force, the Park Service's circle of friends is shrinking. Despite opinion-poll results showing it to be the most popular federal bureaucracy, the Park Service must rely on a tiny circle of special-interest groups to lobby Congress on its behalf. Public sup-



FOR THE  
SEVERE COLD,  
TAKE THIS  
NUMBER  
AND CALL US  
IN THE  
MORNING.

1.800.877.3347 EXT 302

WE MAKE THE SKIWEAR THAT THE  
EUROPEAN SKI PRESS CALLS  
THE MOST INNOVATIVE IN THE WORLD.  
CLOTHES THAT ARE PROFOUNDLY  
PRACTICAL YET FEARLESSLY ATTRACTIVE.  
CALL NOW FOR A FREE MAIL-ORDER  
CATALOG AND LIST OF RETAILERS.  
YOU'LL FEEL BETTER IMMEDIATELY.



POWDER PERFECT SKIWEAR FROM FRANCE  
6611C ODESSA AVENUE VAN NUYS, CA 91406  
FAX 818.787.1075

port is a mile wide and an inch deep.

These weaknesses were glaringly revealed in 1991, a year that was to have been a gala one for the Park Service. Manager of the Kennedy Center and sponsor of the Statue of Liberty celebration, the Park Service knows how to throw a party. And in 1991 it outdid itself. It orchestrated an orgy of publicity: National magazines obediently oozed syrupy stories on "The National Park Service at 75." Television networks cranked out specials on the national parks. Celebrities effused about their nights in the woods. But to many critics, both inside and outside the agency, this merrymaking was like the last party on the Titanic.

The Vail conference was intended to turn the boat around. Entitled "Our National Parks—Challenges and Strategies for the 21st Century," it discussed recommendations from "working groups" that had been commissioned by the Park Service and supervised by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Conveying the authority and prestige of America's oldest university, it was intended to have maximum public impact.

Yet, although many of the recommendations were very good, the conference was not a launchpad for reform. Few among even the most timid critics were asked to speak or chair panels. Historian Al Runte—a mild but hardly radical voice for change—called the meeting a "self-congratulatory cocktail party." Thus it revealed why improvement is a long way off: The Park Service and its friends may want improvement, but they don't want criticism.

RANGERS OFTEN COMPLAIN THAT THE Park Service has two incompatible duties: to promote preservation and outdoor recreation simultaneously. In fact, it seldom tries to balance these two goals. It usually puts tourism first. More than 80 percent of the agency's budget is spent directly or indirectly on tourism, while less than 3 percent goes to research. Having no academic freedom, Park Service researchers are tightly controlled by superintendents who often lack education in or appreciation of science. While the top echelons are reserved exclusively for rangers, whom personnel law defines as "park technicians," their level of educational attainment is appalling. In 1989, 34 percent had no college degree, and only 40 percent had degrees related to protection of natural or cultural resources. Rather than scientists skilled in preservation, rangers are guides and traffic cops, experts in what the Park Service calls "visitor safety and protection."

This situation has long bothered environmentalists, who want the Park Service to put greater emphasis on conservation. But bad as they are, an emphasis on tourism and a lack of professionalism are not the only threats to the national parks. More damaging is the Park Service's confused jumble of natural-resource policies. The Park Service quite literally does not know what preservation is.

Congress's first attempt to define preservation was the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872, which commanded the Secretary of the Interior to "provide for the preservation from injury or spoilation of...natural curiosities or wonders within said park, and their retention in their natural condition." The Organic Act of August 25, 1916, establishing the Park Service, enjoined the new agency "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Unfortunately, even today no one knows what these statements mean. The more closely this language—calling for keeping "wonders" in their "natural condition" and leaving scenery and wildlife "unimpaired"—is examined, the more obscure it seems. As historian Lynn White put it, preservation cannot be "deep-freezing an ecology...as it was before the first Kleenex was dropped." Ecosystems are communities of living things undergoing evolution. We cannot halt change.

In an attempt to frame a more scientifically respectable preservation policy, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall in 1963 charged a prestigious commission, chaired by the prominent biologist A. Starker Leopold, with the task of reexamining the purposes of park management. The Leopold Report, as it became known, concluded that parks should be re-creations of "the primitive scene...a reasonable illusion of primitive America." A prescription for "restoration ecology," it would return parks to the conditions that existed before they were disturbed by civilization and then, through careful management, keep them that way.

The Leopold Report was embraced by the Park Service that same year. But however attractive, it set the agency a chimerical goal. Reconstructing and preserving the "primitive scene" would turn parks into dioramas. Taken literally, it would be impossible to accomplish. We cannot revive extinct species, eliminate many non-native plants and animals, or bring Indians back to live on the land as hunter-gather-



ers. And although many would agree that restoring critical vegetation, rescuing endangered species, and reviving ecologic balance are highly desirable, the Park Service lacks the expertise to accomplish these goals.

So while paying lip service to the Leopold Report, the Park Service ignored the document. Instead, in 1968, it adopted a policy called "natural regulation." This scheme, still in force, stipulates that resource managers must "maintain all the components and processes of naturally evolving park ecosystems" but do so without "interference with natural processes."

The premise of natural regulation is that parks are self-regulating ecosystems that if left alone will maintain ecological equilibrium. And that assumes that parks, visited by millions every year, can actually be left alone.

As a scientific hypothesis, natural regulation is as phony as the phlogiston theory. No park can be an island isolated from effects of civilization. Nearly all parks are missing major components, such as predators, needed for a complete ecosystem. And each continues to be disturbed by a range of human activities from acid rain to automobile traffic. So when "left alone" by resource managers, parks do not revert to their pre-Columbian conditions; rather they become less "original," often losing native species.

Natural regulation fails to preserve "the primitive scene," but this fact has not prompted the Park Service to abandon the policy. Rather, the agency touts the strategy's ineffectiveness as a reason for expanding it, while giving it another name: ecosystems management. Natural regulation has not worked, the Park Service says, because parks are not large enough to be complete ecosystems. But if they are enlarged to encompass entire ecosystems, it claims, the policy of letting nature take its course will succeed.

Unfortunately, this argument, too, is full of ether. Even the biggest so-called ecosystems cannot be isolated from destructive forces of civilization. And no one knows the size of the sanctuary needed to satisfy the evolutionary requirements of its inhabitants. We do not know how much land is required to ensure that grizzly bears, which evolved over half a continent, can exist indefinitely within wilderness islands. So not surprisingly, estimates of the minimum sizes needed to sustain "naturalness" get bigger. In 1980 a report by biologist John Craighead put the size of the "greater Yellowstone ecosystem" at five million acres. This year the Greater Yellowstone

Coordinating Committee, a joint Park Service-Forest Service body, expanded it to almost 12 million acres, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, an environmental group, put it at 18 million acres.

Faced with the difficulty of defending natural regulation, the Park Service and its friends try to cover the dogma with the clothing of science. But often the results are embarrassing. In 1989 the National Parks and Conservation Association, a Park Service booster group, convened a committee to reevaluate the Leopold Report. Treating the document with the reverence due a sacred text, this "Blue Ribbon Panel" reaffirmed its infallibility (the Leopold Report, it said, remains "as pertinent today as it was in 1963") while simultaneously, like a liberal clergyman interpreting the Bible, offering a new exegesis of its meaning: The intent of the report, the panel said, is "to preserve, to the maximum ex-

*The Park Service  
tries to clothe  
dogma in science,  
with embarrassing  
results.*

.....

tent possible, the biotic assemblages that existed, or would have evolved, without the 'discovery' of America by Columbus and subsequent European settlement."

In this one sentence the Blue Ribbon Panel captured the nostalgia, amateurism, and gross intellectual deceit that passes for preservation-policy debate within Park Service circles. Demanding to keep parks as they "would have evolved" is like asking Native Americans to live as their culture "would have evolved" had Cortés not introduced the horse and gun to the New World. Hypothetical conditionals—sentences that state what "would have happened"—are not verifiable scientific statements. They are metaphysical mush.

THE FITS AND STARTS OF PARK SERVICE policy and the intellectually pathetic attempts to justify it reveal that while everyone wants preservation, no one knows what it means. Many biologists, for exam-

## NORTHEAST

Paragon Sporting Goods  
New York, NY

Fortunoff  
New York  
New Jersey

## MID ATLANTIC

Radcliffe & Co. Jeweler  
Towson, MD

Lilly's Crown Jewelers  
Virginia & West Virginia

## SOUTHEAST

LeRois of King Street  
Charleston, SC

Levy Jewelers  
Savannah, GA

S & S Jewelers  
Melbourne, FL

H & H Jewelers  
Coconut Grove, FL

## MIDWEST

Watchworks  
Chicago, IL

Siebke-Hoyt Jewelers  
Cedar Rapids, IA

Herkner Jewelers  
Grand Rapids, MI

## SOUTHWEST

Chepita Fine Jewelry  
Aspen & Snowmass Village, CO

Roberts Jewelers  
Corpus Christi, TX

Shaya Fine Jewelry  
Santa Fe, NM

## WEST COAST

Paul-Thomas Jewelers  
Salt Lake City, UT

Dodson's Jewelers  
Spokane, WA

Skeies Jewelers  
Eugene, OR



TAG-Heuer  
SWISS MADE SINCE 1860



Jan, Maria and Sophie Stenstadvold and Buck, Conundrum Creek, Colorado

## Get to know us.

*Sport/utility car racks for the way you live.*

**YAKIMA**

**800-348-9231**

*for a free catalog*

ple, would say that preservation is the promotion of biodiversity; this is the goal of The Nature Conservancy and the United Nations Biosphere Reserve Programme. But even this concept is far from clear. It can refer to the number of species, to the abundance of each species, or to some combination of these two measurements. Estimates of ecological health depend on which standard is chosen, and no one is necessarily more "correct" than another. Thanks to invasions of exotic plants such as Kentucky bluegrass and musk thistle, for example, Yellowstone National Park probably has more species than it had 200 years ago. But the numbers of many of the original species—such as beaver, bighorn sheep, and white-tailed deer—have plummeted. Most people would say that the park is therefore worse off, even though one kind of biodiversity has actually increased. So choosing a criterion of biodiversity is a matter of deciding what characteristics we desire a particular ecosystem to exhibit. Preservation, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder.

Partly scientific and partly a question of public choice, therefore, the issue of park preservation should be widely debated, both by ecologists and the lay public. Instead, discussion has been restricted to an elite clique of Park Service friends—the Leopold Committees and Blue Ribbon Panels. But by failing to frame intellectually defensible definitions of natural preservation, these prestigious groups have helped to make pseudoscience official policy.

Indeed, the NPCA embodies this cliquishness. Although technically independent, this group maintains an incestuous relationship with the agency. Its president, Paul Pritchard, was formerly deputy director of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, a federal agency later absorbed by the Park Service. The NPCA itself, established in 1919 at the suggestion of the first Park Service director, Stephen Mather, and first run by a friend of Mather's named Robert Sterling Yard, was created as an advocacy group for the Park Service. "With you working outside the government and with me working inside," Mather told Yard, "we ought to make the national park system very useful to the country." But this inside-outside arrangement also often permits the NPCA to control the national parks agenda. Playing on both sides of the street at once, NPCA pronouncements, such as the Blue Ribbon Panel's, strongly influence policy while simultaneously preempting wider criticism. As long as people believe that this group is

**Teflon® for fabrics**

RESISTS STAIN, RAIN & SOIL

**ROFFE**

Teflon® is made only by DuPont. For Roffe Brochure/Dealer List, call 1-800-822-3668.

## The End Of Skiing As We Know It.

*But it's just the beginning  
of a night of dancing,  
dining, soaking. Even a  
little sleeping. It's all in our  
free Winter Vacation Kit.  
Call 1-800-COLORADO  
ext. 312. Or write Vacation  
Kit, Box 38700, Dept. 312,  
Denver, 80238. Allow 3 to  
4 weeks or send \$3.50  
for First Class delivery.*

**COLORADO**  
1-800-265-6723



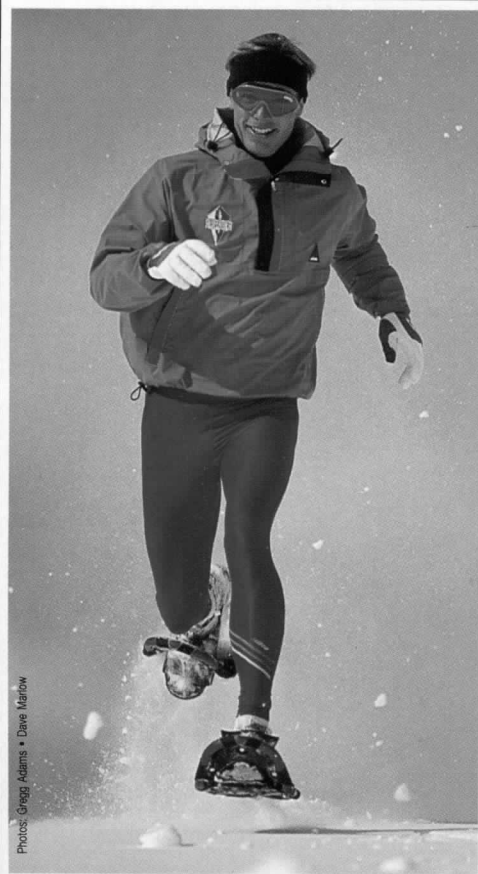
watching the Park Service, they remain silent.

Just as the Soviet Union was long embarrassed by Stalin's insistence that Trofim Lysenko's wacky theory of evolution—the doctrine of inheritance of acquired characteristics—be officially accepted, so the United States will eventually grow red-faced about endorsing natural regulation as the official theory of preservation. As with the Lysenko theory, confusions about natural preservation are the product of a decision-making process in which public debate seldom occurs and is sometimes suppressed. (The NPCA, for example, did not publish a minority report written by several members of the Blue Ribbon Panel who were unhappy with that committee's conclusions.)

Thus kept out of the preservation debate, the public and the wider scholarly community have remained silent, and influence over policy has fallen by default into the hands of a small coterie of featherbedding congressmen, bigwig concessionaires, and grey-flanneled Beltway conservationists. But these interests do not want real reform. They view widening the policy debate or expanding the Park Service's constituency as a threat to their own special relationship with the agency. So instead of pushing for real improvement, they lobby for expansion of the park system, thus burdening the Park Service with more properties than it can manage. Most congressmen are motivated only by a desire to have as many parks as possible in their districts. Concessionaires want more parks so they can make more money. Environmental organizations lobby hard to make more and bigger parks in which their members can recreate. So none of these interests wants criticism of the Park Service, which might diminish public enthusiasm for their park-expansion agendas. Yet strong criticism is a prerequisite for reform.

That is why the Vail conference was disappointing. The public needed to be there. But principal speakers and panel moderators were either cabinet members who know nothing about park issues (such as the keynoter, Education Secretary Lamar Alexander) or the same old tired group of NPCA insiders.

Within the context of these political forces, it is not surprising that preservation policy remains in disarray. It is almost never discussed and indeed was not included on the Vail agenda. Yet until the circle of debate is widened, no amount of tinkering with the structure and budget of the National Park Service will save the national parks.

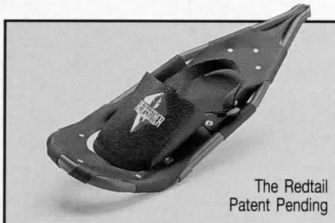


Photos: Gregg Adams • Dave Marlow

### THE HOTTEST SHOE ON SNOW! REDFEATHER!

Just slip 'em on & take off uphill, downhill, cross-country. Perfect for runners, walkers, hikers & outdoor enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels.

\$220 as shown complete with Insulux™ the first insulated binding for snowshoes.



The Redtail  
Patent Pending

#### REDFEATHER SNOWSHOES

332 West Main Street Aspen, Colorado 81611  
800-525-0081 Immediate delivery